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KURT WIESE

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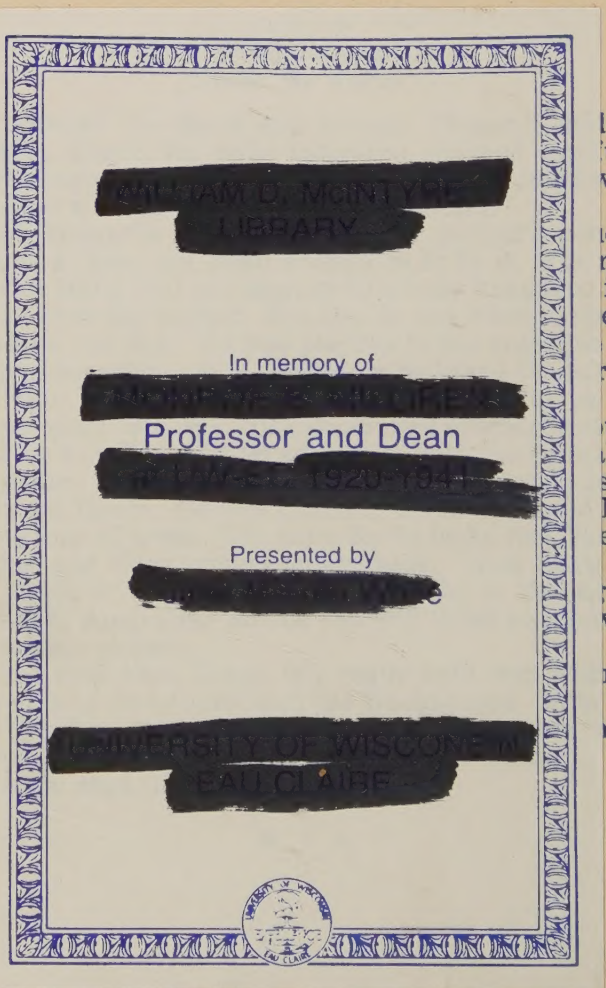
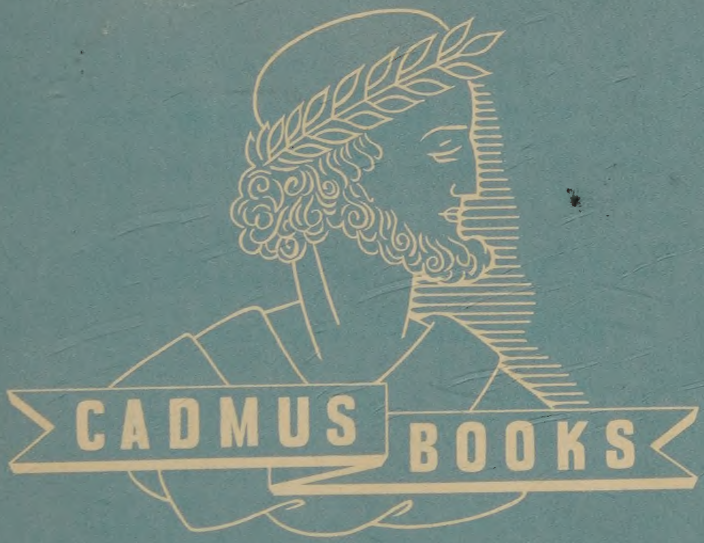
BY KURT WIESE

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BOOKS

KAROO, THE KANGAROO

BY KURT WIESE

Author of
"Buddy, the Bear"
"Walie, the Walrus"

"Beware the fierce and hungry Dingos," said his mother. Karoo, the baby kangaroo, listened carefully. "The Dingos are wild dogs. Never waste a second when you hear a Dingo bark. Fly for my pocket."

All kangaroo babies stay in their mother's pouches as long as they are small enough to fit in it. The most terrible thing that can happen to a baby kangaroo is to be lost from his mother. But that is just what happened to Karoo one day. He was playing in the sunshine and eating nice green grass. Suddenly he heard the bark of a Dingo. Where could he run? What could he do? Where could he hide? His mother was nowhere around.

This was Karoo's first adventure with the animals of the plains. He had many, many others. There was the furry fat Kaola. He was a kind of small bear who lives in the tops of trees. The baby Kaola looks just like his mother and rides around on her back. Then there was the Anteater. Lots of people think he is the ugliest animal in Australia. Maybe you will think so too when you see his picture.

The only time Karoo felt really safe was when he stayed near that funny bird the Kookaburra. This bird was a killer of snakes. His voice and manner made Karoo tremble, but even that was better than . . . But you must read the story to find out.

* * *

Karoo, the Kangaroo

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Written and Illustrated by

KURT WIESE

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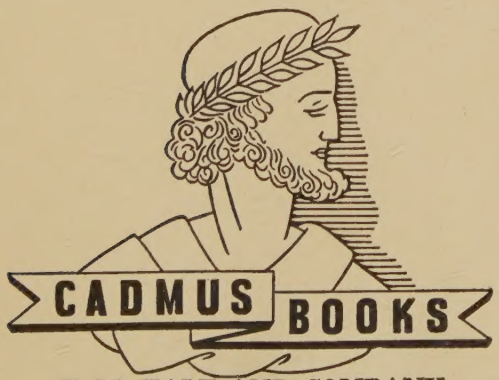

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Karoo, the Kangaroo

KAROO, THE KANGAROO

I

Karoo, the Kangaroo was born in a land where it rains but once a year. The sands there are so thirsty that they drink up all the water, and there are few rivers that run between green banks down to the sea. Australia is a pleasant place, in spite of that, for the sun is warm. When little Karoo was born, there was no fur at all on his smooth little body, no bigger than a squirrel's, and he was glad about the warm sun, and glad there was no rain, as he curled on the ground waiting for his mother. Presently she came jumping through the tall grass. She picked him up tenderly with her strong soft lips. Then she dropped him in a pocket inside herself. That is what mother kangaroos are famous for!

II

Inside his mother, in her warm, dark, deep, soft pocket, Karoo went sound asleep as children do in bed. It was very cosy. And after a while, velvety brown fur began to grow on his bare little body. And his hind legs grew longer and longer. But his front legs stayed short. And his tail grew even faster than his hind legs, and it grew strong enough to use as a brace. He could sit upon his tail almost as if it were a stool, when his mother was standing still. When she hopped about, that was different. But when she was listening, or sunning herself, or quietly eating, Karoo practiced mightily with his short front legs, and his long hind legs, and his fine strong tail.

III

By and by he could sit up, and he thought "Maybe I can hop." So he pulled himself up by his front paws, and poked his head out of his mother's pocket to have a look at the world. What he saw was one of the great rolling grassy plains of Central Australia. Hundreds of beautiful Kangaroos were nibbling the tender green grass. It was a most exciting luncheon. Not far away, well balanced on his stout and useful tail sat an old, old Kangaroo, Captain Kango Kangaroo. Suddenly Captain Kango wiggled his ears and waggled them and whistled through his nose. And when he whistled, all the hundreds of Kangaroos went plop and hop, hoppity hop. They went in a herd. They went in a rush. Hop. Hop. Ploppity hop. Karoo's mother pushed him inside her, plop, fast quick into her pocket, and hop, hop, off she went as fast as the rest. She didn't want to be left behind. Hop, hop! Little Karoo wondered what it was all about. But nobody stopped to tell him what the hurry was for.

IV

By and by there came a day when Karoo's mother let him out of her pocket and began to teach him the ways of a proper kangaroo. He learned to jump. Just at first he often tumbled and landed on his velvet nose. Then he learned to leap and land in elegant curves like Captain Kango's. He nibbled at the sweet green grass, that grew higher than his head, and he watched all the others out of the corner of his eye. "I am growing up," he said to himself, "and I am a part of this great big wonderful herd." It was very fine to be a kangaroo in the spring of the year on the wide plains of Australia.

V

Karoo's mother gave him rules to keep him safe. "Karoo, my little Kangaroo," she said, admiring his bonny little velvet coat, "eat plenty of fine, green, tender grass, but never, never, wander out of your mother's sight. Between nibbles look and see just where I am, and at any strange sight, or any strange sound, steer with your tail, and jump for my pocket.

"And most particularly, ever and always, beware the barking Dingo. The Dingos are wild dogs. They are fierce and always hungry, and they eat Kangaroos. Never waste a second when you hear a Dingo bark. Fly for my pocket. And all your life, when you hear the bark of a Dingo, make haste. The Dingos run so fast themselves that Kangaroos must always hurry out of their sight. Dingos are dreadful. Every proper Kangaroo knows that!"

VI

Little Karoo was much impressed. And every day he watched his mother out of the corner of his eye. But one day, when the sun was very bright, and the wind played tunes among the grasses, he forgot. He was practicing with his stout tail, and jumping more and more like Captain Kango, when he heard a warning whistle, and far across the plain the terrifying bark and yelp of the Dingos. He looked for his mother. She was nowhere to be seen. "Mother! Mother!" cried Karoo, but there was no answer, and the whole herd came through the grasses with a sound like thunder and the big flying feet of Captain Kango, leaping, leaping, knocked poor little Karoo into the sand under the grass. The bristling, barking, snarling Dingos in a great pack came bounding after. The noise was terrible. The dust was, too. By and by, Karoo stopped trembling and sat up. Far away in the distance all the Kangaroos and all the Dingos were vanishing. Little Karoo was alone.

VII

Karoo was sad. He did not wish to be all alone in the world. So he decided to follow the footprints of the Dingos and the Kangaroos. As he hopped along over the plain, the grasses seemed to grow taller and taller. "I think this must be the forest," he said, when he came to a big Eucalyptus tree. He was very tired so he sat down under the tree and went to sleep. When he woke up, it was dark. The white trunks of the gum trees frightened him. The loose bark on the trees scratched in the wind and made flapping sounds. All sorts of noises that he did not know the why of, worried him. All night he shivered, and his little heart ached whenever he thought of how kind his mother was and how warm and soft her body used to be when he slept in her pocket.

VIII

Long before the sun was golden, when the day was still gray, Karoo made up his mind to go back to the grassy plain. The forest was too strange and different. Out on the plain, even being lonely was not so bad. The sun was warm. The dew dried. He was nibbling at his breakfast in a most contented way, when he heard a sly slither in the grass. It was a snake! A coiled black snake with wicked eyes and darting tongue. With all the strength of his whole young life in his sturdy little tail, Karoo pushed off and leaped into the air. Over the snake and away like hopping lightning, Little Karoo made for the forest.

IX

When he reached the shady woods his heart began to beat more slowly. He caught his breath and hopped to a clearing in the forest. Karoo looked around, and lo, climbing a young gum tree was his mother's friend, Kaola, the chunky Australian bear, with a baby bear on her back. "Kaola, Good One," shouted Karoo. "Help me. I lost my mother when the Dingos came barking upon us. Where has the herd gone?" "That I cannot say," said Kaola, kindly, "but Ant-eater will know. Look for him in his cave beyond the three eucalyptus trees. He comes out in the open to feed. I stay hidden in the leaves, and see no one pass. But Ant-eater knows everything that goes on in the grass and on the plain." So Karoo hopped off toward the three trees.

X

Sure enough, there was a cave door in the sunny patch beyond the three trees. "Ant-eater, Good One," shouted Karoo, "come out and help me. Show me the way to the herd. I lost my mother when the Dingos came barking upon us." Then Karoo became very frightened for the Ant-eater seemed to him more ugly than any other creature, with his back like a stubby bobbed porcupine, skin as thick and tough as shoe soles, and a nose that was as long as a policeman's club. "That I cannot say," said the Ant-eater kindly, "but the Duck's Bill will know. She spends her days swimming up and down the little river which is the only one for hundreds of miles around. All the animals come to the river; she can hear under water and she will tell you where the kangaroos spoke of going. Go west until you come to the river, Karoo, and then shout."

XI

So Karoo hopped west. By and by, he smelled water. A few more jumps and he came to a flowing river with gum trees green along the bank. "Duck's Bill, Good One," he shouted. Bubbles came up from the water. Karoo's mother had told him many things about Duck's Bill—how she laid eggs like a bird, and had a mouth like a beak. Yet she was an animal and fed her babies with her own milk. Duck's Bill rose from the water and looked out of small cross eyes at Karoo. "Duck's Bill," said Karoo politely, "where has the herd gone? I lost my mother yesterday when the Dingos came barking upon us." But Duck's Bill said, "Only the Dingos have drunk of the river since yesterday. When they came all creatures stay away." And she started to slip under the water again. But Karoo looked so tired that she added, "Go deep into the jungle and call the Kiwi—an old wise bird who knows all things without seeing or hearing any of them."

XII

So Karoo hopped straight into the forest, and the trees grew thicker and thicker and the path very dark. "Kiwi," he shouted. "Kiwi," and by and by, suddenly right in front of him was Kiwi—a portly fellow with a very long beak, with a thin mustache all around it. His legs were strong and his feet were like a giant's rake and very good for scratching. "Kiwi, Good One, you who know all things, which is the way to the herd? Yesterday I lost my mother when the Dingos came barking." "The herd is very far away," said Kiwi slowly. "You must go and ask the birds who live in the tops of the trees. The Kookaburra will know for he lives on the edge of the forest and he has very big eyes." Then Karoo began to cry. "That is where the snake lives. I cannot go there to ask." "Don't be silly," said the Kiwi. "Don't you know that Kookaburra is the great Snake-killer? Clever snakes never come near the nest of the Kookaburra."

XIII

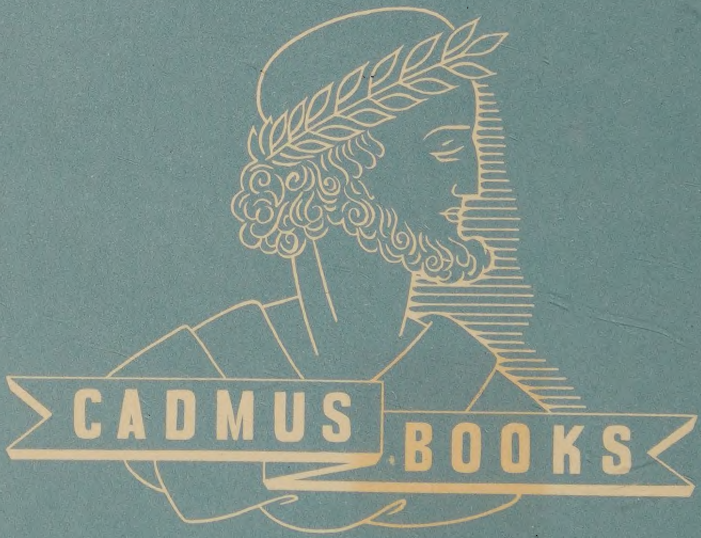
So Karoo turned around and hopped back through the forest toward the grassy plain. He was growing tired, and feeling very blue when he came to the Red Gum tree. He sat down sadly and waited for the sun to set. Soon the light faded and the Kookaburra and his wife arrived. When Kookaburra saw the little Kangaroo, he began to laugh. "HaHaaHaHaa! Haw Haw Hoo Hoo Hoo!" It was the most terrible and cruel noise Karoo had ever heard. Karoo stopped trembling long enough to shout, "Kookaburra, Good One, where has the herd gone? Yesterday I lost my mother." "Haw Haw Hoo Hoo Ha Ha!" crowed Kookaburra. "The Dingos almost got your mother, but she is where the herd is now. Due East across the desert." Karoo pushed hard on his strong young tail and started off Due East.

XIV

He had not leaped very far when he saw that it was night so he hopped straight back to the Red Gum tree, where he could see the Kookaburra up in the tree. Safe from the snakes, he slept all night, and early in the morning when the stars were still in the sky he started off again, after a mouthful of delicious grass, Due East across the desert. He hopped all morning, and he did not stop at noon. There was not a single leaf to munch nor any blade of grass. All around him was the desert. So he hopped Due East all night long, and in the morning licked a little dew from the rock for his breakfast and hopped Due East, as if he were running away from the little black shadow that was the only company he had. When the sun was red in the sky and just going down, he caught sight of something green and knew that the rim of the desert was just ahead. Karoo was too tired to jump any further, so he lay down in the cold sand and did not open his eyes until daybreak.

XV

Karoo woke with a start, and there all around him was the herd. Karoo leaped high in the air. He was surprised himself that he could jump so high. Old Captain Kango caught sight of him and made a most familiar toot. Karoo heard a sound like rushing and thunder. The herd jumped toward him, and there was his mother, looking lovelier and kinder than all the rest. She snatched him up and dropped him in her soft warm pocket. It was almost too small for him. He knew then that he was almost grown up. But it was very nice to be there, cozy and safe, with their two hearts throbbing like two parts of the same tune. He could hear her voice saying, "I think it will never happen again!" "Absolutely," said Karoo to himself as he snuggled down to rest from his trip across the desert.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